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ABSTRACT

In the language-experience approach to reading instruction, communicative skills are viewed without distinction among listening, speaking, spelling, and writing. The children learn to conceive of expression and reception of expression as natural parts of experience, rather than as separate tasks that occur during a break in regular activity. The skillful language-experience teacher weaves opportunities for communication practice (listening, speaking, writing, reading, and dictating) unobtrusively into the fabric of daily experience. Through this practice, the child comes to feel that he can talk about what he thinks, that he can talk about what he can communicate in other ways, and that he can recall what he or others dictate and what he or others write through reading. The child comes to recognize letters and their function, and learns little by little the details of language use, because he wants to. New skills are put to immediate use and receive immediate positive feedback. Through this method, children not only learn to read better, but they also develop mature concepts about the value and use of reading and other communicative skills. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document]. (MH)

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LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES WHICH PROMOTE READING

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What Is a Language-Experience Approach?

A language-experience approach to instruction in reading is one that make no distinction between the development of listening, speaking, spelling, and writing skills. All are considered to be essential in the instructional program and are viewed by teachers as providing reciprocal reinforcement. All facets of language are used as experiences related to the reconstruction of printed materials. All experiences of a child which can be exprssed in some media, but especially in oral language, are included as the raw material out of which reading refinement grows. During the instructional program, each child conceptualizes:

- I can talk about what I think about

  In a program devoted to the improvement of all aspects of communication, the thoughts of each child become the basic ingredients. The thoughts and language of other people as recorded in stories and books will influence the learner, but this influence is not fundamental to the beginnings of new learnings. Language meanings develop in the mind of the learner. They are modified, extended, and elaborated through sources outside the learner. Printed materials are only some of the sources. Firsthand experiences provide most of the enrichment of thougth and conversation.

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- What I can talk about I can communicate in some other way

Forms of expression of ideas vary a great deal, but in most classrooms they are painting, drawing, modeling, construction, talking, dictating, and creative writing. Some teachers use such forms as dramatic play, rhythms, and dramatizations, but often these activities are interpretations of another person's ideas rather than expressions of the child's own ideas.

Although painting, speaking, dictating, and writing will continue to be the most popular and most personal forms of recording and sharing ideas in classrooms, all forms of self-expression should be utilized. Thus children participate in a variety of modes of communication and experience success in many ways.

- Anything I dictate or write can be recalled through speaking or reading

Experiences with picture writing, dictating, and writing with letters of the alphabet help the child to recognize that writing is much more precise and comes nearest to recording exactly what an author has to say.

The abilities required for effective written communication do not emerge with lessons only.

They emerge as each child moves back and forth between writing and listening and speaking and reading. The whole development depends on oral communication ~~xx~~ that stems from the desire of a thinking individual to share his ideas.

- <u>I can learn to read some of what I ~~xxxx~~ dictate and some of what other people have written</u>

The child who from the beginning has related speaking, listening, and writing to the reading process begins to read naturally--just as he learns to converse with people he meets. Reading, for him, is not a separate subject in school but is a natural part of sending and receiving messages.

- <u>As I talk, dictate, and write stories, I use some words over and over, and some words not so often</u>

Most children enter school with large listening vocabularies. They use the words that adults in their homes and communities use. They use these high-frequency words in a variety of meanings. The instructional task is not one of <u>presenting new words</u> to children as a beginning step in moving them toward reading. It is a task of helping each child to:

--recognize the visual forms of words he uses in talking

--realize that all the children use many of the same words

--understand that even the people who write stories for him to read use these words over and over.

- As I observe the writing of my speech or write it myself, I see the same letters used over and over

When the phonetic elements of his own language are taught through experiences, the child learns phonetic understandings in a sequence from saying and hearing to seeing. This method ensures that the understandings are applied to real language experiences of each individual. Children make valid generalizations in acquiring language long before they begin analysis of that language.

- Each letter of the alphabet stands for one or more sounds that I make when I talk

To develop the understanding that letters stand for familiar sounds, the teacher first records the oral language of the individual. As the child begins to explore writing, he uses basic phonetic understandings rather than spelling memory. Even though many of his attempted spellings are incorrect, he is able to apply some of the basic phonetic principles to represent the sounds of his language. Developing the understandings becomes a learning experience that will continue throughout life. None is completed in early childhood.

Children are released from anxieties about learning to read when they conceptualize the idea that speaking and writing and reading are all aspects of one thing--

our language. They realize that most of the words found in the printed stories are the same ones they use in their own speech and writing. If a story deals with an idea that has some meaning to the reader or listener, word meanings will be enriched and clarified and vocabularies will be enlarged.

- Most of the words I speak and write other people use when they speak and write things for me to read.

Children who dictate and write many stories and see their own ideas recorded at an early stage of development learn to respond to the ideas of authors when reading. This result contrasts with that of reading instruction in which an author's ideas are lost in the mechanics of trying to analyze words and relate speech sounds to printed symbols. In effect, these children read from the beginning as though they were conversing with the author.

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Basic Framework for a Language-Experience Approach

A basic framework is needed to guide planning and to suggest pupil activities which will change and improve every child's language ability--including reading. Such a framework was developed over a period of years as the result of the pursuit of one central question: What are the language experiences that can be extended in an instructional setting to make a difference in an individual's ability to communicate his ideas and his feelings?

The framework which is the result of the years of study suggests three areas for program planning:

1. Extending experiences with words--a focus on the continuing responsibility of the teacher to help each child have available more and more words and sentence patterns with which to communicate his thinking and his feelings.
2. Studying the English language--a focus on the continuing responsibility of the teacher to help each child understand the coding and decoding processes of his language, multiple meanings of words, personal style of authors, idiomatic expressions, and the many symbols other than alphabet symbols that speakers and writers of English use to communicate.
3. Relating authors' ideas to personal experiences--a focus on the responsibility of the teacher to help each child gain confidence in interacting with ideas and language of others.

Within each area of emphasis there are essential language experiences which must be fostered through self-selection processes and through direct teaching procedures. Twenty essential language experiences are extended through the program, Language Experiences in Reading, by Allen and Allen. (Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, Chicago, 1966-1969.)

Essential Language Experiences

Procedures for developing a language-experience approach give each child a chance to express his thoughts, his ideas about things in his environment, his aspirations, and his notions of personal conduct. The child does these things in the following ways:

1. Talking about topics of interest

   Each day there are opportunities for some children to talk about self-selected topics ~~af~~ and interests on a personal basis.

2. Discussing topics of interest

   Boys and girls engage in discussions ~~tap~~ of topics of interest as they arise. They respond and react to each other's ideas. The teacher and children identify topics that seem to have interest for many children. Some time every day is devoted to the development of discussion skills. Frequently other people's ideas are brought into the discussions through reading on the topic.

3. Listening to the language of many authors

Each day there are opportunities to listen to stories and poems. The teacher reads and children listen to recordings and films. They become acquainted with many sentence patterns that are not in their natural speech on entering school.

4. Dictating stories and poems to the teacher or other adult

The teacher or another adult records stories and poems dictated by the children about paintings or personal experiences, or from imagination. Individual rather than group compositions are emphasized.

5. Telling stories

Interesting conversations and stories are taped during story-telling time to be played later for children to enjoy. The teacher serves as a model for story telling and encourages children to develop and tell stories of their own.

6. Exploring writing and writing independently

Children have opportunities and materials to explore writing as a recreational activity--their names, words they can copy, and eventually their ideas.

7. Authoring books

Children dictate their ideas or do their own writing of them for individual and class books. These books are placed in the classroom library for browsing and sometimes are made available for children to take home.

Authorship of individual books is the culmination of an essential language experience for the child.

This essential experience is one of the child's having his ideas valued, expressing those ideas in words, observing and/or feeling the words being written with the letters of the alphabet, hearing the same words read back at a later time, and gaining an awareness that all reading material is talk that has been written.

8. Relating reading to talking and writing

Each day the children hear some of their own stories read to illustrate the relationships between talking, writing, and reading. They listen to other stories and gain an awareness that other authors use many of the same words and phrases they use.

9. Expanding vocabularies

Children expand their vocabularies as they view films without words and make their own commentary, as they walk together in the community and learn to describe their world, as they sing songs and play games that repeat words that they have never used before, and as they play with the materials in the classroom by assuming roles of people that use different vocabularies in their work and in their imagination.

10. <u>Reading in the environment in which they live</u>

Each day children have opportunities to test out their reading abilities. They gain confidence as <u>readers</u> as they observe:

- weather — hot or cold? / wet or dry? / windy or calm?
- plants — green or brown? / dead or alive? / large or small?
- time of day — early or late? / morning or afternoon? / dark or light?
- faces of people — happy or sad? / smiling or frowning? / serious or joking?
- texture — smooth or rough? / fuzzy or prickly? / slick or sticky?
- colors, sizes, shapes, feelings, actions
- signs on the way to school
- popular brands on television programs
- names of stores in shopping centers
- some of the words dictated in stories
- words in newspapers and magazines
- stories written for children to read.

11. Developing an awareness of common vocabulary

As dictated stories are displayed in the classroom, children will begin to recognize that some of the words are used by almost everyone who talks. They can find these words in the stories whether they can recall them or not. They are helped to see that there is much in their own language that is in the language of everyone else. From this point on, many children begin to see these same words in printed materials such as library books, newspaper ads, and stories projected onf filmstrips.

12. Increasing sensitivity to style and form

Experiences in observing, feeling, tasting, hearing, imagining, and listening to poetry and stories provide daily contacts with the ingredients of language that result in the style and form of sensitive writers. Children learn to listen to the beauty of language as well as to the content.

13. Studying words

Each day the teacher calls attention to the sounds of words and invites children to repeat those which give some children difficulty. As children dictate * their stories, the teacher talks informally about relationships between the sounds we make with out voices and the letters of the alphabet selected to record themm. Children learn to listen to the beauty of language as well as to the content.

14. Reading stories and books

As soon as children can read some of the simple things they dictate and write, they should be encouraged to read them to an audience. This experience will lead naturally to the reading of the stories and poems of other authors in an audience situation.

15. Using a variety of resources

As children share experiences and tell stories, they are helped to see that people share their ideas and feelings in many ways--by talking, writing, painting, composing music, taking photographs, and in other ways.

16. Comprehending what is heard and read

Each day children listen to instructions and carry out plans that are developed through discussion. They may work from instructions read to them from time to time as a means of developing the ability to follow the details of language from a person not present in the classroom. Through these experiences they learn to discuss the meanings of words in context and the thoughts in passages or whole selections.

17. Summarizing

Each day some children tell stories that may or may not be related to paintings. They are encouraged to tell the whole story and, if it is long and involved, to choose one or two ideas for the teacher to write. This

experience in summarizing one's own thoughts develops ability to listen to and read stories and then select the main impressions, the outstanding ideas, and some of the details that are heard.

18. Organizing ideas and information

Following walks and field trips, children may briefly restate in order what happened. They can also view a film and simply restate what happened in the order that they remember. They statements can be recorded in writing or on tape and then tested against the film when it is shown again. A camera and tape recorder may be taken on a field trip to record the events and the explanations. The information gathered through the pictures and on the tape can be organized into a class book or a bulletin board display.

19. Integrating and assimilating ideas

As children listen to stories, look at films and filmstrips, and hear recordings of stories and music, they have continuous opportunity to comment on their personal experiences and feelings as they relate to what they are hearing and seeing. They talk about things like and not like what has happened to them. They see and hear their own experiences elaborated and extended in many ways. They should begin to feel that reading is an extension of personal experiences.

20. Listening and reading critically

Continuing contact with the ideas of the peer group and those of many other authors provides opportunities to sort out those ideas that are fact or fiction, that ~~that~~ deal with the real and the unreal, and events that did happen or might have happened. Recording actual information through paintings, dictation and writing is important; but it is just as important to provide a learning environment that includes and welcomes imaginative ideas and language. Children should have experience in sorting out the differences and recognizing the values of both.

Re-definition of Reading

In the broad field of reading instruction as it related to total communication, the emphasis on a basic framework of language experiences is accompanied by a re-definition of reading as "an extension of personal language." This definition gets to the fundamental problems of

- valuing the thinking of boys and girls, regardless of how limited;
- accepting the real language of boys and girls, regardless of how divergent from standard English used in textbooks;
- encouraging boys and girls to express their thinking in many forms--talking, painting, modeling, acting, constructing, dictating stories and poems, and writing creatively;

- representing the thinking of individuals in written form by taking dictation and encouraging writing for pleasure--thus assuring a measure of success at all times and at all stages of language development;
- reconstructing (reading) the written material which reflects the thinking of boys and girls in the classroom--individual books, class books, newspapers, magazines--and then comparing their ideas and language with those of other authors;
- influencing the thinking and the language of boys and girls through the use of multiple resources--books, films, recordings, study prints, study trips, television, radio--so that their talking, listening, writing, and reading will mature in accordance with their inner drives, ideals, and personal goals.

What a child can hear, say, observe, and write of his own experience and imagination is as important in this definition as his ability to reconstruct the thinking and the imagination of other people. Children develop mature concepts about what reading really is in the world about them, such as:

Its values in their own lives.

The skills they need to develop in order to achieve their reading purposes.

The relationship of reading to thinking.

The stimulation which reading can give to creative living.

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